

I would like to introduce you to a new ritual which I hope will contribute to the family of rituals and observances that seem to be emerging and are relevant to our relationship with the earth.

This ritual focuses on What We Are and is based the tradition of the five elements — Air, Fire, Water, Spirit and Earth.

Throughout history, rituals and religious practices have evolved through processes of assimilation and adaptation of pre-existing forms. What I am proposing, follows this pattern. It is a ritual based on the combination of two traditional elements: an ancient geometrical figure, the pentagram and the weaving of swords into a lock in English long-sword dancing.

The Pentagram and the five elements. A modern ritual.

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The Pentagram

The use of the pentagram as a symbol goes back to Sumerian times (c. 3000 BCE).

The pentagram has long been associated with the worship of the Goddess in her connection with the planet Venus. It was known to ancient astronomy that a line joining the projections of successive inferior conjunctions of Venus (over an eight year period) onto the circle of the zodiac forms an almost perfect pentagram.

In classical Greek culture, the Pythagoreans saw in the pentagram a form of mathematical perfection.

In the esoteric philosophy of the medieval neo-Pythagoreans the five vertices of the pentagram represented the five classical elements, thus:

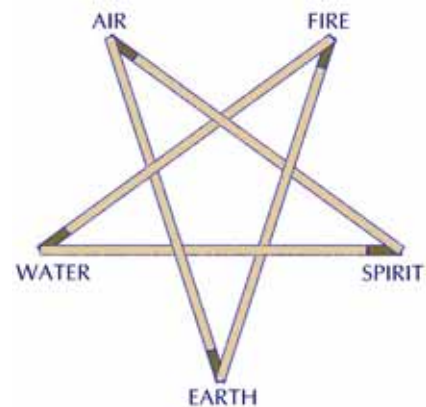
ὕδωρ, *hydor*, water

γαία, *gaia* earth

ἱερόν, *hieron* a divine thing (spirit)

ἔιλή, *heile*, heat (fire)

ἀήρ, *aer*, air



The ritual follows this scheme in company with Wicca and some other contemporary groups.

The English Long-Sword Dance

The weaving of either six or eight 'swords' into a lock is a traditional part these dances. I can't find any account of the origins or significance of this element of the dance.

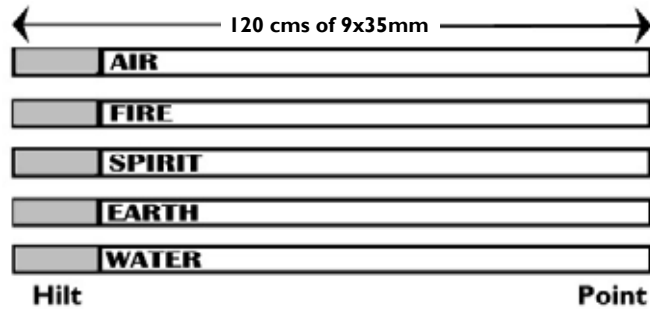
The logo of the Country Dance and Song Society of Massachusetts shows a five sword lock, similar to the pattern used in this ritual, but there is no information about its origin.

The method of producing a five sword lock is described on the next two pages.



MAKING THE PENTAGRAM

The pentagram is made of five softwood laths. In keeping with the tradition of English Sword dancing the ends of the laths will be called hilt and point.



Making the pentagram involves a circle of five people. Clockwise round the circle they represent Air, Fire, Spirit, Earth & Water. Each holds the hilt of one of the laths in their right hands with the points upwards.

1. Air lowers the point of his/her lath into the left hand of Spirit.

2. Fire lowers the point of his/her lath into the left hand of Earth.

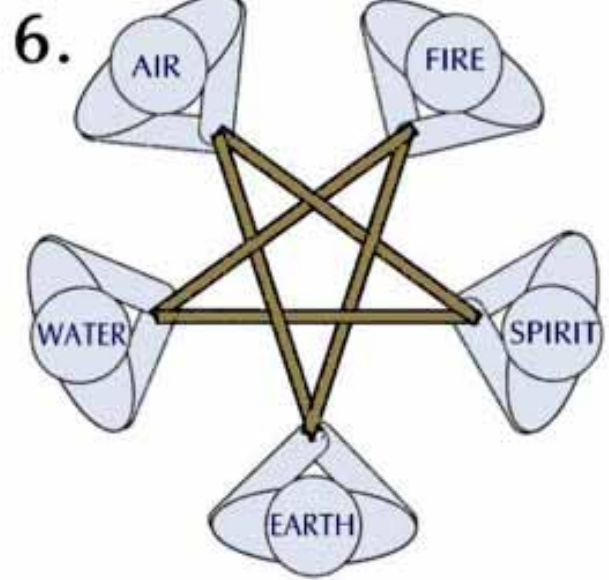
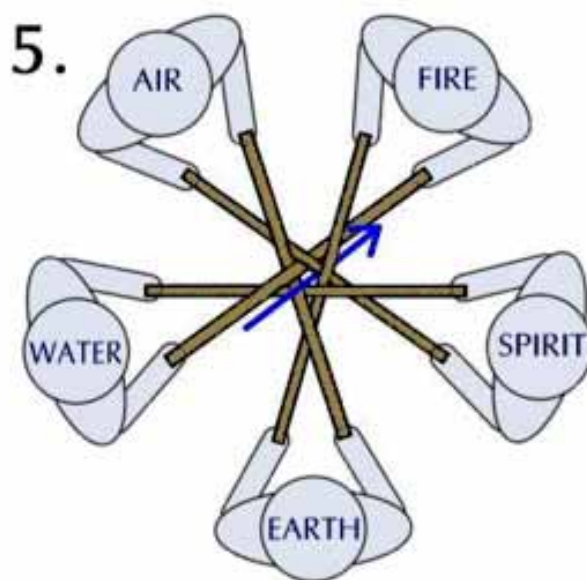
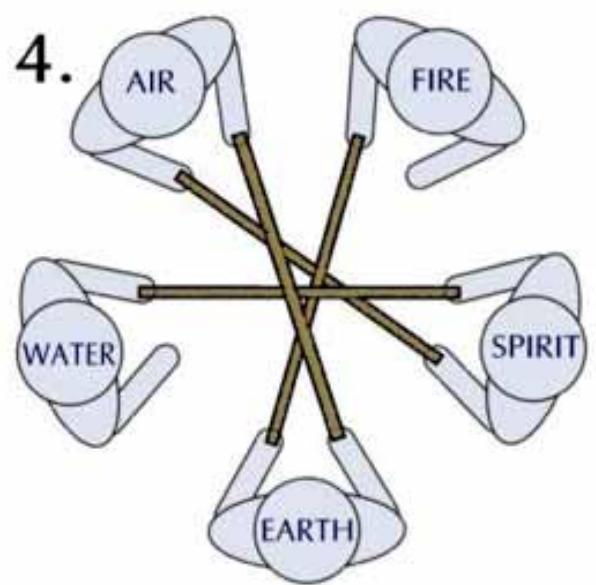
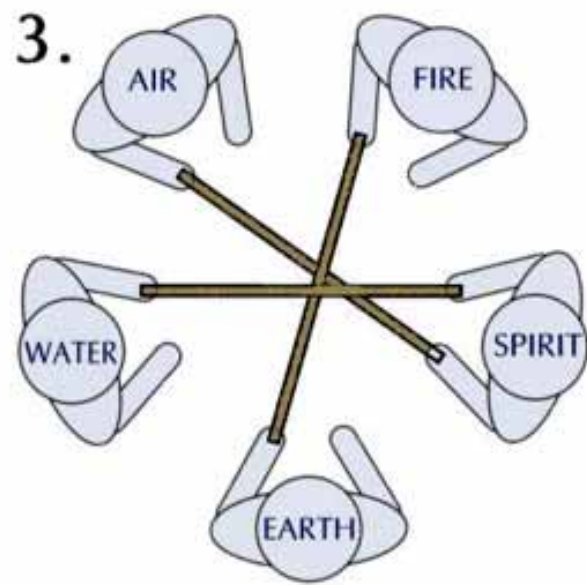
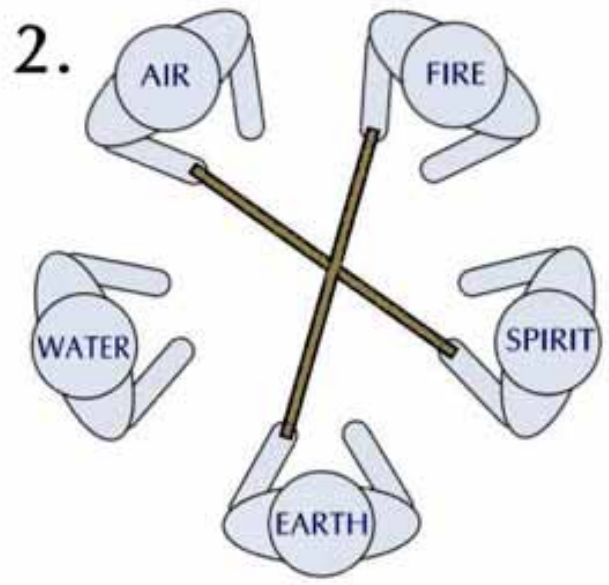
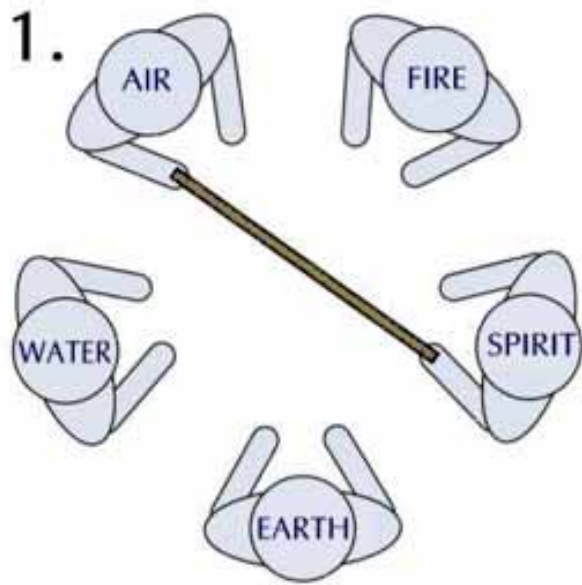
3. Spirit lowers the point of his/her lath into the left hand of Water.

4. Earth lowers the point of his/her lath into the left hand of Air.

5. Water lowers the point of his/her lath **passing it under the lathe between Air and Spirit** and into the left hand of Fire

6. All five people bring their hands together bending the laths and sliding the point in the left hand over the hilt in the right hand

The Pentagram is complete



The Ritual

What follows is a suggested format for the ritual. It can be modified and adapted to suit the group and the circumstances involved. It is assumed that the group performing the ritual are standing or sitting in a circle

The person who represents Water should be the leader (previous experience is a good idea). Water calls for four volunteers to join in making a circle within the larger circle. Water hands out the laths, clockwise in the order Air, Fire, Spirit, Earth, and supervises the making of the pentagram as described on pp. 2-3, explaining how the five elements are woven together in the form of a pentagram forming an endless loop representing the whole universe.

Earth then holds up the completed pentagram and all join in the chant:

Air I am,
Fire I am,
Water and Spirit
And Earth I am.

This can be repeated five times as Air, Fire, Spirit, Earth and Water circle to the left with Earth still holding the pentagram, as in the long-sword dance tradition. The chant can also be sung as a round.

An additional option is to say the words of the Five Sacred Things:

The earth is a living, conscious being. In company with cultures of many different times and places, we name these things as sacred: air, fire, water, and earth. They live in the four directions, north, east, south, and west.

Whether we see them as the breath, energy, blood, and body of the Mother, or as blessed gifts of a Creator, or as symbols of the interconnected systems that sustain life, we know that nothing can live without them.

To call these things sacred is to say that they have a value beyond their usefulness for human ends, that they themselves become the standards by which our acts, our economics, our laws, and our purposes must be judged. No one has the right to appropriate them or profit from them at the expense of others. Any government that fails to protect them forfeits its legitimacy.

All people, all living things, are part of the earth life, and so are sacred. No one of us stands higher or lower than any other. Only justice can insure balance: only ecological balance can sustain freedom. Only in freedom can that fifth sacred thing we call Spirit flourish in its full diversity.

To honour the sacred is to create conditions in which nourishment, sustenance, habitat, knowledge, freedom, and beauty can thrive. To honour the sacred is to make love possible.

To this we dedicate our curiosity, our will, our courage, our silences, and our voices. To this we dedicate our lives.

From: Starhawk. *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (Bantam, 1993)

When the chant is finished the pentagram is laid on the ground in the centre of the circle and the makers rejoin the larger circle.